fires. The techniques the groups use, down to videotapes, are the same locally as nationally; they bring in many of the same nationally known speakers, and the tactics are the same: No compromise, overwhelm the opposition. But Peck says that does not add up to intimidation.

Peck: The people who are now involved in the gun rights issue here in Colorado are very responsible, and the issuance of threats or anything like this is beyond the call of duty with respect to these people, and I'm not going to stand for it. But then again, the people are not doing it either.

Conan: You don't believe it?

Peck: I don't believe it.

Robin Hyde (Speaker #5): The guns she wants to steal from us tonight are the same guns the British tried to take from us a couple of hundred years ago. It didn't work then, it won't work now, because for everyone of us here tonight trying to peacefully beg you to not to start another war, there are a thousand quiet citizens who are going to wait till they see the whites of your eyes before they make a statement. The Second Amendment ain't about duck hunting. That is why we hope we're successful in convincing you to pull the plug on this rapist and her blueprint for criminality, because if you don't, you may rest assured there will be no Tiananmen Square in the country that was born at Concord Bridge...

Donahue: We cannot tolerate this in these chambers.

Hyde: Concord Bridge, gentlemen.

Conan: This testimony was the most extreme of the evening in the Denver City Council. The speaker, Robin Hyde [sp], is well-known there as both an articulate activist and something of an eccentric. Afterwards though, the leaders of the Colorado Firearms Coalition including Jay Peck, spoke repeatedly about Hyde getting it exactly right, about how important he was for his shock value, and about how he hit the nail on the head when he told them he had seen tyranny in the eyes of the Denver City Council.

Donahue: Roll call on 714. (Audio of roll call of Denver City Council.)

Conan: As the council plunged on to another bill, perhaps a hundred and fifty frustrated opponents gathered for a brief rally in the dark on the steps of the building. They collected money for a court challenge and vowed no surrender.

Unidentified Opponent: Our flag and our constitutional rights have been in trouble many times before. Why don't we sing a song right now that commemorates another time when things looked very bleak, but free men and free women fought together and kept our rights going? (Audio of National Anthem.)

Conan: Kathy Reynolds, the sponsor of the assault gun ban, conceded that the display of political organizing that the Colorado coalition put together in Denver was awesome. Besides the impressive turnout, leaflets were delivered to

mailboxes were tied up for days. They are powerful and passionate, Reynolds said, but they are not God Almighty.

Reynolds: Yes, I guess I would go through it again. I'm not sure all colleagues would agree, because it's been tough. It- I won't minimize that it has been; there's been a lot of pressure, and the way I will continue to pay, is there will be a continued piece of harrassment, at least for a short period of time. And the gun lobbies will probably target me, but I'm not sure that's always a negative either. Yes, it- it's worth it, I think.

Conan: Though a campaign to recall Kathy Reynolds fizzled, the Firearms Coalition delivered a batch of anti-Reynolds leaflets to every house in Denver last week, the first in a monthly campaign, Jay Peck swears. State Senator Pat Pasco says she plans to reintroduce her assault gun bill in the next session of the state legislature. This is Neil Conan reporting.

Edwards: Tomorrow: Guns and teen suicide. Some families say if it weren't for the gun, they would have had a chance to prevent their child's death.

# # #

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DATE December 11, 1989
TIME 7:10-7:30 PM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

TRANSCRIPT

Noah Adams, co-anchor:

Every hour in the United States an average of four Americans are killed by firearms. That's thirty-three thousand people a year. We chose one week in early November to look more closely at the reality behind this figure. Reporters in four American cities spent a day tracking just one homicide in their locality. Tonight, in the first of a week long series on guns in American society, reporter Joe Maglino follows one fatal shooting in Miami; a city that recorded five hundred forty-two deaths by guns last year. One note, this report contains graphic material about the murder.

Joe Maglino reporting:

It's been another quiet night at homicide, the detectives working the three to eleven shift wander in and out of the squad room, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, cracking bad jokes. Some sit at small, beat-up old metal desks, sifting through evidence collected from murder investigations not yet solved. This week there has been time to work on these old cases. So far, only three names have been added to the board at the back of the room. The board that lists the homicides one by one, month by month. In January there were twenty. Sandra Bucher (sp) was the first to die, caught in a domestic dispute, she was shot with a .357 magnum. Next was Donald Stringer, murdered with a 9mm pistol. Lazaro Pons died later that month, killed in a robbery with a .38. Then Chacino Gordon, Carlos Perez, John Spence, Reggie Gamble, Lynn Lawand, Rosemary Bernard, Evita Seal. Next to each name the cause of death: dispute with a gun, domestic with a gun, robbery with a gun, accident with a gun, a .357, a 9mm, a .38, a shotgun, a semiautomatic rifle.

Sometimes detectives remember something personal about the killings, but most often they don't remember much. Afterall, there are so many: Two hundred and thirty-one so far this year. It's ten-thirty now, almost the end of the night. Each time the phone rings, the detectives grumble. They don't want to be called out now, a homicide now would mean working all night and into the weekend, missing the big Miami game and dinner with the family. But still the call comes in. Detective Carol Blair is sent out to respond.

Detective Carol Blair (Miami Police Department): We're heading to Jackson Memorial Hospital Emergency Room. The victim was transported there by Fire and Rescue, and that's where he was pronounced deceased.

Maglino: Blair is relatively new to homicide. Tonight she has the job of beginning this murder investigation. All she knows at this point is that a gunshot victim is dead. She says most investigations start out this way, with little information about the crime or the person who's been killed.

Blair: Apparently it's a shotgun wound. That's the information that we have right now.

Maglino: The ride to Jackson Memorial is a quick one. The detectives all say this is where they would want to be taken if they were seriously hurt. The doctors here have been known to work miracles. Carol Blair walks quickly past the ambulance attendants and the nurses in admitting. She heads straight for the Trauma Room.

Blair: This is where they probably cracked open his chest trying to massage his heart and so forth. As you can see, it can get pretty messy, and there's about probably ten to twelve people working on the man trying to save him, and obviously it didn't work.

Maglino: In this room it's painfully obvious the battle to save a life has been fought and lost. Signs of that struggle are everywhere. Medical instruments are scattered. Hospital scrubs, surgical gloves, gauze, and bandages fill two trashcans. The floor is covered in blood. On it the footprints of the doctors and nurses who race to keep a person alive are caked and drying. Soon they'll be washed away by an old man whose only job is to prepare this room for the next trauma victim. Carol Blair quickly takes in the scene, then she turns to find the doctor in charge.

Blair: What time did you pronounce him?

Unidentified Doctor: Twenty-two twenty.

Maglino: The doctor looks like a recent med school graduate, fresh-faced and handsome, but tonight he's tired and distracted. He keeps one ear on a walkie-talkie waiting for the next emergency call, while he provides the detective with the briefest information. The victim, a male, had no pulse, no heart rate when he was brought in. Blair makes notes, then goes to examine the body herself.

Unidentified Woman: You got this one, huh?

Blair: Yes, I'm not even going to dare count how many holes he's got in him, because as soon as I count them, (inaudible).

Unidentified Woman: Yes.

Maglino: In a small room called the Shower Room, two technicians- a man and a woman from Metro Dade's Major Crimes Lab- have cleaned up the body and taken photographs of it. The sight is startling, even to detective Blair.

Blair: He's got gunshots everywhere. Jesus, look.

Maglino: There is a look of horror frozen on the face of the man lying on the examining table. His eyes are huge and bulging. His mouth is wide-open, gaping as if he were forming a silent scream. His shirt has been ripped off, it's stuffed between his legs. He's fat. His hair is black, curling at his neck. He has a mustache. His jeans and his underwear have been pulled down around his ankles. His feet are bare. He's dark skinned, but his feet seem to be losing color, fading like the life that's been drained out of him. Dangling from his toe, a murder mystery cliche, a tag that identifies him. Case number 551-918J. Across his chest are large, crude stitches, and everywhere on his body are tiny, perfectly round holes- holes made by the pellets from a shotgun fired at close range. Pellets that have ripped this man's insides apart.

Blair: They've penetrated the heart. They've penetrated the lung cavity. And he's got a lot of blood on the inside.

Maglino: Carol Blair walks around the body, making notes. The lab technicians swab the victims hands, checking for gunpowder residue. That will tell them if he fired a gun. When the tech's are done, they head back to the lab. The detective must get blood samples to compare with blood at the scene. She must track down the victim's belongings. She makes notes endlessly.

Unidentified Man: You know the family members are here?

Blair: Oh yeah?

Unidentified Man: Yeah.

Maglino: While Blair has been examining the body, the victims family has arrived. Called by police, they've been ushered into a waiting room. The detective is told by hospital staff that the family members are Hispanic- they don't speak English and they haven't been told that the man is dead.

Blair: You're going to get the doctor to tell them?

Unidentified Man: Yes, sir.

Maglino: Carol Blair is visibly uncomfortable with this part of her job. She calls on the attending physician to break the news to the family. Blair stands outside the door and listens to the moans of grief: The realization that a husband has been murdered, that a father is dead. In the hallway, hospital personnel walk by, no one seems to pay much attention.

Unidentified Doctor: Can we call the Spanish interpreter so that they can have some help?

Maglino: It seems to take an eternity for the interpreter to arrive. There are questions that must be asked for the investigation. While everyone waits, a young woman comes out of the room- the victims teenage daughter. She doesn't venture far; she stands against the wall. Her eyes show her hurt, silently she weeps. Detective Blair sees her, and tells the men who've come from the Medical Examiner's office not to bring the body of her father past her.

Blair: Gentlemen, thank you. I'm going to stay in here until you go by, and if that little girl tries to get near you just say (inaudible) it's a lady or something like that, because they're pretty distraught and they might want to tear off the cover cause they wanted to see their father, and nobody wants to see their dad like that.

Maglino: When the girl is out of sight, the men wheel the body out, indistinguishable, wrapped in a thick black cotton body bag. Later this morning an autopsy will be performed, then the body will be transported to the funeral home. Only then, after a mortician masks the brutality of this man's death, will this family see him. They'll never know the devestation of the shotgun blast.

Blair: That's too much trauma for anybody. For a family member to see somebody, that would just- that would leave an horrible, horrible memory in somebody's mind for years to come, and the fact that it's a gun shot wound, I mean that's a horrible plight.

Maglino: It's one-thirty now and Carol Blair has completed this part of the homicide investigation. This is what she's learned: The victim, a black latin male in his forties, was a gas station attendant; for weeks now, his family said, he was fearful, he worried that he was being set-up for a robbery, he asked the owner of the gas station for better lighting, but when that was done, he was still afraid; he decided to get a gun to protect himself. From detectives on the scene, Blair has learned that the man may have been murdered in a failed robbery attempt. He was found sprawled on the sidewalk as if he were chasing someone. No money was stolen. Blair will head to the scene of the crime now to meet the rest of her team. They'll work through the night until they're too tired to go on- rounding up witnesses, questioning them while the events of this night are still fresh in their minds. They'll stay on this case until they're up for the next homicide. For National Public Radio, this is Joe Maglino reporting.

Adams: Tomorrow our examination of individual homicide cases continues with a report from San Antonio, Texas.

Linda Wertheimer, co-anchor:

For the opponents of gun control in the United States, the second amendment to the Constitution is the basis for what they consider to be the inviolable right to keep and bear arms; words that are etched in stone on the headquarters building of the National Rifle Association. In full, the second amendment reads as follows, "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." Does this confer on each American the right to keep the gun of his or her choice at home? The courts have, on occassion, said no. NPR legal affairs correspondent Nina Totenberg has more on what the second amendment means.

Nina Totenberg reporting:

There may be a lively debate about whether the Constitution confers on individuals the right to bear arms, but that debate is not going on in America's courts, its law

schools, or its scholarly legal journals. Indeed, even the National Rifle Association could not recommend for this broadcast a single constitutional law professor who would defend the second amendment as conferring on individuals the right to bear arms. The right to bear arms, say most judges and scholars, is a right conferred on a citizen militia such as the National Guard. The contrary argument is made most often by lawyers affiliated with the NRA, gun enthusiasts who appear frequently on NRA programs.

Excerpt from "The American Rifleman": This is "The American Rifleman," the radio magazine of the National Rifle Association.

Totenberg: NRA advocate Stephen Hallbrook (sp) grounds much of his argument in the history of the second amendment. The fact that the British tried to disarm the American colonists to prevent the revolution.

Stephen Hallbrook (NRA): A well regulated militia, according to the founding fathers, meant all able-bodied people. The purpose of the second amendment is to assist guaranteeing a well regulated militia by encouraging the people to keep and bear arms. It was thought that an armed populace would be the final and surest defense of liberty from both foreign invasion as well as possible domestic tyranny.

Totenberg: But the prevailing legal theory in the courts has been that the second amendment does not safeguard individual ownership of guns in the home. Professor Frank Zimmering (sp) of the University of California, Berkeley, is perhaps the nation's leading scholar on guns and the second amendment.

Frank Zimmering (Professor, U.C., Berkeley): The National Guard would be the twentieth century moral equivalent of the militia, and it would keep it's weapons, by the way, in armories. I'm told that the battles of Lexington and Concord were started by the British invading to get the weapons of a militia.

Totenberg: NRA advocate Hallbrook responds that the founding fathers did not intend to limit militias to the National Guard.

Hallbrook: The National Guard is a state and federal sponsored institution, in fact, it's ultimate loyalty is to the federal government not the states. It is a select militia of a small number of the total population, and the founding fathers warned against a select militia, as they called it, and meant that a well regulated militia would be all able-bodied persons.

Totenberg: Indeed, a recent NRA ad suggested that if the Chinese students in Tianamen Square had had the second amendment right to bear arms, they might have won their battle for freedom. Professor Zimmering rejects the notion that the second amendment gives individual Americans any such right to bear arms.

Zimmering: To take it all the way down to the individual, in other words, it seems to me, and decide that what we have is a right for new revolutionary groups to spring up, the only

modern company that the NRA has, in suggesting that this is a good thing, are the Black Panthers and the paramilitary groups. And it is certainly far from a constitutional argument that has ever had legal success in this country.

Totenberg: The spectrum of judges who have publically rejected the NRA's interpretation of the right to bear arms is breathtaking: Ranging from Judge Robert Bork to the recently retired Justice Lewis Powell. Powell, in a speech last year, linked the lack of gun control in this country to the high murder rate.

Justice Lewis Powell (Retired Justice, Supreme Court): With respect to handguns, as opposed to sporting rifles and shotguns, it is not easy to understand why the second amendment or the notion of liberty, should be viewed as creating a right to own and carry a weapon that contributes so directly to the shocking number of murders in the United States. During the Vietnam war, some fifty-eight thousand Americans were killed; during that same period in the United States, seventy thousand were killed by firearms.

Totenberg: The U.S. Supreme Court has never, ever rejected any gun control measure on second amendment grounds. It has left in place a lower court decision that okayed an outright ban on handguns. The court's major gun ruling was in 1939; in that year, the justices unanimously upheld a ban on so-called gangster weapons (machine guns and sawed-off shotguns). Using the same reasoning that the court did in 1939, the nation banned bazooka's in 1968, and there seems little doubt that a modern day ban on semiautomatic weapons would be upheld. NRA critic Zimmering concedes that when considering what the founding fathers meant when they adopted the second amendment, the historical record is ambiguous, but judges and scholars of all political stripes agree that the judicial interpretation of the amendment has been a one-way street. Again, Frank Zimmering.

Zimmering: It's not that no one takes it seriously any more, if you talk about reported court cases, nobody ever took it seriously.

Totenberg: So the NRA doesn't win cases in court on the second amendment, rather, says Zimmering, gun groups wrap themselves in what they see as the spirit of the amendment and then use that spirit to lobby legislatures.

Zimmering: What the gun groups are really doing is not making a technical argument. It's a kind of a lobbying in the legislative process that they use the second amendment for far more often, and with more success, than they use it as an argument in a court of laws- to constrain the legislature once the legislature has spoken. So, it's the second amendment much more as kind of music, as lyric to a legislative debate.

Totenberg: I'm Nina Totenberg in Washington.

Adams: The average American gun owner is not a nervous city dweller who buys a handgun to protect his family. Surveys say he is Southern, rural, male, affluent and middle class, he grew up in a gun culture where skill with weapons was passed down from father to son, and he is three times more likely to

use his firearm for sport and recreation than for self-defense. NPR's John Burnett reports.

John Burnett reporting:

On mild Fall weekends, Bob King comes out here to a flat piece of land, just southeast of Austin, Texas, covered with mesquite and cow chips, to hunt whatever's in season. A few years ago, in a gesture of Southern hospitality aimed at waterfowl, King had a small pond dug to serve as a sort of tourist court for the widgens, gadwalls, pin tails, and teals flying down from Canada.

Bob King (Hunter): This is a Remington 1100 12-gauge, and what Kevin's got is the same thing, a Remignton 1100, and they hold three shells. And that's all you're allowed to shoot is three shells.

Burnett: Dr. Bob King is probably not your typical hunter. He's a linguistics professor at the University of Texas at Austin. He grew up in Haddiesburg (sp), Mississippi in the fifties at a time and a place where everybody hunted: his grandfather, his father, his brother, all their friends, and all his friends. When asked why he is passing the tradition on to his own two sons, King paraphrases a passage from Edmund Burke, the eighteenth century British political philosopher...

King: He talked about the fact that you could not- you don't live just for yourself, you know you live with the accumulation of tradition, and of your heritage, and all of the rest of that stuff. To be a man is something that extends through time, and given where I grew up, given who I am, and as much as the outdoors has meant to me, this is simply part of my life and it's a part of my life that I wouldn't care to have to give up.

Burnett: The overcast sky is the color of cigarette smoke this afternoon. We're sitting behind a duck blind consisting of camouflage netting drapped across a young willow tree. King, a compact, confident man with a salt and pepper beard, studies the ashen sky. His thirteen year old son, Kevin, wearing a rain poncho and tennis shoes, stares off into the bleak landscape contentedly.

King: You've done this one, this one's easy.

Kevin King: I've done that one. (Sound of duck call.)

King: OK, now, this is really the hard one. (Sound of duck call.) That sounded very feeble, very weak. Not bad, alrigth, you're getting better.

Burnett: Most hunters are not politically active, but hunters do not ignore the fractious gun control debate because many of them believe that one day it could end up at their own gun cabinets.

Do you, in your darkest moments, think that the anti-gun movement is ultimately aimed for your shotgun?

King: Yes, I do. I would like to think that you could make reasonable dividing lines. For example, I'm in favor of gun control. I think it's far to easy to get pistols, or AK-47's

and Uzi's.

Burnett: But if you had to take sides one day, if there was no gray, and they said, 'Bob King, you're either with us- you're going to stand with the NRA, or you're going to stand with handgun control, what's it going to be?'

King: I would be for handgun control, OK. I used to belong to the NRA. When they- I guess what it was, when they came out against that, whatever that thing was about the police chiefs wanted to ban armor piercing bullets, and the NRA decided no, no, no, we can't support that. I said that's stupid. And here comes a duck; look there goes a duck.

Burnett: Time and time again, King brings the caller to his mouth and lets loose with a well-practice quack, but the sky remains empty. Finally, a lone widgen circles in from the South and flies directly overhead.

King: If he makes another pass, take him. Take him. (Five shots fired.) Damn. Well, there's one that got away.

Burnett: By 5:30 it's too dark to shoot anything, so we head back to the Chevy Suburban. At day's end no one has bagged a duck, but all in all it's been a satisfying afternoon: we saw a snipe, two cormorants, and several flocks of dove that whirled up into the sky as we walked past.

King: Well, this is the end of a very typical hunting day. You had a nice time, but you didn't get a thing, and it doesn't really matter.

Burnett: In Austin, this is John Burnett reporting.

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DATE December 12, 1989
TIME 8:40 AM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM Morning Edition

TRANSCRIPT

Bob Edwards, anchor:

Suicides account for more than half of the thirty-three thousands deaths caused by firearms each year in the United States. Guns are the most common method used by both adults and teenagers who are attempting suicide; they're also the most lethal. Today, we continue our series on guns in America. NPR's Margot Adler examines the relationship between guns and suicide.

Margot Adler reporting:

The stories are so similar there's a kind of banality in their repetition, a tale told by family or friends of a suicide victim: a mother suffering from a new bout of depression, a friend grieving over a divorce, a gun lying around the home or sitting on a shelf in a neighbor's house.

Two weeks ago last night, Carol Lewis learned that her dear friend, Lynn Circe [sp] had shot herself with a handgun. A well known community leader in Fort Worth, Texas, Circe had been deeply depressed since she and her husband separated. Carol Lewis became angry when she learned the next day that her friend had bought the gun the very morning of her death.

Carol Lewis (Friend of Suicide Victim): I was stunned. Even though she was depressed over the separation, I felt that the easy accessibility of the gun is what made her do it. I mean, she bought the gun, from what I'm told, at nine o'clock in the morning, and by 10:15 she was dead.

Adler: Researchers and doctors say that a person who is determined to commit suicide will usually find a way. But many acts of suicide are done with ambivalence. What they say specifically about suicide with a gun is that death is almost always certain. Whereas perhaps one out of ten die from a suicide attempt with poison, more than eighty percent of those who attempt suicide by gunshot succeed. And it takes very little force or ability to commit suicide with a firearm.

Last May, Stephen Nodvin [sp] lost his mother. She suffered from depression, and had made several previous attempts. She had been rescued by family members each time, but when she used a gun, there was no second chance.

Stephen Nodvin (Son of Suicide Victim): It's my understanding that she drove up the street, went into a gun shop, purchased a gun, and I don't- have been told this- that they even loaded the gun for her, because as I said, I never knew that she even had held a gun.

Dr. Michael Peck (Clinical Psychologist): If a handgun is available and it's loaded, and the person puts it to their head or in their mouth and squeezes the trigger, it's over for them.

Adler: Dr. Michael Peck, a clinical psychologist and former director of youth services at the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center.

Peck: Whereas, if an individual cuts themselves, takes pills, carbon monoxide or other methods, the chances are rescue are much greater.

Adler: Peck says that sixty-five to seventy percent of suicides involve firearms, a majority, handguns. Some argue that these high numbers are due to cultural factors. In Japan, for example, stabbing is one of the most common methods. Dr. Garen Wintermute [sp], professor of family practice at the University of California/Davis, argues that culture doesn't play that big a role. He says that since handguns are purchased for protection, they're often just lying around.

Garen Wintermute (Professor, Family Practice, UCD): Because they're purchased for that reason, they're kept easily available and very often kept loaded. If I'm buying a gun for protection, I want it right now at three in the morning when I'm half asleep and there's a stranger's footsteps in the hallway. And even in homes which have more than one gun- they have handguns and rifles and so forth- the handgun is most likely to be easily available to use, given an impulse to do so.

Adler: Availability is also key for adolescents. Dr. David Brent, professor of child psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh, compared the profiles of adolescent suicide victims with adolescents who were hospitalized for suicide attempts.

Dr. David Brent (Professor, Child Psychiatry, Univ. Pittsburgh): One of the only things we found that was different between the two groups was that guns were about two-and-a-half times more likely to be available to the suicide completers than they were to the comparison group, and from that we concluded that probably the availability of guns was a risk factor for suicide.

Adler: There is an adolescent suicide in this country every ninety minutes, more than five thousand every year. Pamela Cantor [sp] is a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and president of the National Committee on Youth Suicide Prevention.

Pamela Cantor (Professor, Harvard Medical School): Sixty-five percent of all our teenage suicides are committed with guns. That is a very high percentage. The next highest percentage is the use of pills, which is 11.3 percent, so you can see the discrepancy, and how many of our teenagers do in fact use guns. Now, the question is, where do these kids get these guns? They get them primarily from their own homes. Their parents keep guns in the house either for recreational

purposes or for protection, and yet, they are not aware of how many times their own children or a member of their family will use these guns accidentally or on purpose to kill themselves or another member in the household. There was a study that was done in Seattle that said for every time a gun is used in actual protection-, for actual protection, it is used something like eighty-seven times for an accidental or suicidal death.

Adler: Cantor says teenagers make a hundred attempts for each completed suicide, but again, with firearms death is almost certain. Clinicians say that teen suicides are often impulsive and often occur in the presence of drugs or alcohol. If a lethal agent is not immediately available, the suicidal impulse may pass. In the death of Lynn Circe for example, she had called 911 before she shot herself. The arriving ambulance heard the shot.

Of course, there are high suicide rates in many countries where handguns are less accessible. Suicide was around for thousands of years before guns were invented. Dr. Michael Peck believes if guns were unavailable, there would be a sudden drop in the suicide rate, but it would not be permanent.

Peck: And then when the populace became accustomed to the fact that firearms were not available, other means would substitute. Whether in the long run we'd have lower rates or not, it's hard to tell.

Adler: But Dr. Garren Wintermute cites an experience in England, where many people used to commit suicide by inhaling the coal gas used in kitchen fuel. The English then changed to a non-lethal fuel.

Wintermute: Coal gas suicides went essentially to zero, simply because the gas was no longer available, and there was not a corresponding rise in suicide by other means.

Adler: For Juliet Rousseau [sp], whose brother committed suicide in November, these arguments cannot begin to capture her feelings. Her brother miraculously survived a firearm suicide attempt in July, but was blinded. Released from a psychiatric hospital, he took a taxi to a gun store in Virginia.

Juliet Rousseau (Sister of Suicide Victim): He was a blind person; he did not yet have the use of a cane. He had a rather blatant wound in the side of his head, and yet, this gun was sold to him.

Adler: She, like many others who have been personally affected by handgun suicides, argues for stricter licensing, mandatory waiting periods, and that guns not be so accessible to those who have been hospitalized with psychiatric disorders.

Rousseau remembers asking her brother about the gun after his first attempt.

Rousseau: I did ask him many times, 'What if you hadn't gotten a gun? What if?' He did say if he- maybe if he had more time, if he hadn't had it in his hands the way he did... it was the immediacy of the thing.

Adler: And Carol Lewis, reflecting on her friend, Lynn Circe.

Lewis: You know, there are moments in our lives when, if we can get through those moments, we can go far beyond them, and I happen to think this was just one of those moments in her life. So, yes, there are other methods- I have no way of knowing what she would have done, but I really feel that her life would not have been taken had the gun not been so readily available.

Adler: There is obviously an argument that there is a right to die, and perhaps a right to your weapon of choice, but clinicians, researchers, and the family and friends of those who have committed suicide argue consistently that the suicidal impulse can pass and rescue can often succeed, though rarely in cases where guns are involved. I'm Margot Adler.

Edwards: Tomorrow: women and guns. The makers of firearms consider women a new market. Many women view guns as a way to free themselves from fear of violence.

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DATE December 12, 1989
TIME 7:10 PM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

TRANSCRIPT

Noah Adams, anchor:

Tens of thousands of people die every year from gunshots in robberies, accidental shootings, domestic disputes, suicides. As part of our series on guns this week on "All Things Considered," we are telling a few of the stories, the details of death known only to the police, the emergency room staff, and the families of the victims.

Tonight, we go to San Antonio, Texas and NPR's John Burnett. Please note: This report contains graphic material.

John Burnett reporting:

The autopsy team is counting the bullet wounds in Marcelino Gill [sp]. There are three so far. The pencil-sized holes have soaked his pinstriped shirt and black leather vest with blood. His eyes are open but they're expressionless, revealing nothing about his last minutes alive, lying on the rear floorboard of his brother's car. Because he is a homicide, his case will come before the three other bodies lying on gurneys parked before stainless steel sinks in the autopsy room. Dr. Suzanna Dana [sp], the deputy medical examiner, scans the crime scene report before walking briskly into her office to put on a scrub suit, white plastic apron and thick rubber gloves.

Dr. Suzanna Dana (San Antonio Deputy Medical Examiner): Basically, this is the case of a twenty-one-year-old white male, who was riding around in a van with his brother, and they were confronted or essentially assaulted by some people who shot multiple shots through the van, killing the deceased and then injuring his brother. The case is relatively straightforward as compared to other homicides. Some other homicides are very difficult. They're very time-consuming and very involved.

Burnett: The employees in the Medical Examiner's Office do get upset over the bodies of children, but not victims like Marcelino Gill. They see them all too often, Hispanic males in their early twenties involved in drug dealing and killed by gunfire. The case will become memorable only because seventeen hours from now, the older brother, twenty-three-year-old Manuel Gill, Junior, will die of a lethal gunshot wound to his left aorta. That makes it a double homicide. But for the moment, the attention is on how Marcelino Gill died.

An autopsy is true to the Greek roots of the word: to see for oneself. The procedure seems gratuitous, macabre, and

somehow desecrating, as though the person were being murdered again. The body will be denied the peace that is supposed to come with death. But Dr. Dana, after thirty-two hundred autopsies, does not waste time on emotionalism. She is a forensic pathologist: efficient, dispassionate, and dedicated to her work. Somebody has to do it, she says, so that justice can be served.

Dana: The function of the medical examiner is to detail those wounds so that evidence can be presented in court, should the suspects be brought to trial.

Burnett: An autopsy begins much the way an insurance adjuster inspects a damaged car. Dr. Dana walks around the unclothed body, recording its physical appearance. A small speck on the inside of the right arm is identified as a needle track. A tattoo on his back reads, 'Born to raise hell.' The words are superimposed on a machine gun and a skull smoking a marijuana joint. But the reckless message of the tattoo seems incongruous on the skinny, fragile corpse of the young man, as though he were not nearly as tough as he thought.

Dana: This individual had a total of... four gunshot wounds, two of which were graze wounds which wouldn't have caused death; another was a through-and-through wound of his right shoulder that wouldn't have caused death; and another was a through-and-through wound of his chest, which did cause his death.

Burnett: Dr. Dana is almost sure the chest wound killed him, but she must also determine what did not kill him. This means inspecting every vital organ for disease, tumors or a hidden bullet wound.

The scalp is cut from ear to ear and pulled forward over the face. A hand-held bone saw removes a portion of the cranium. A quick snip of the spinal cord releases the brain which lifts out easily. The scalpel traces a large Y which begins just below the shoulder bones, meets at the breastbone and continues as one incision that ends below the navel. After twelve hundred cc's of blood is ladled out of the chest cavity, Dr. Dana reaches in with both hands. There, she quickly finds the trail of holes that the bullet made in the dark red tissue in its split-second journey through Marcelino Gill.

Dana: The fatal wound actually struck the individual right below the right rib cage on the front of his chest or abdomen, went up into the pericardial sac, which is the sac surrounding the heart, went through the right side of the heart and then the left side of the heart. It was going in an upward direction so that when it exited the sac, it then went through the left upper lobe of the lung and exited the back, causing his death at the scene.

Burnett: Seeing the shell of Marcelino Gill with all of his life-giving organs lying in a stainless steel pan six feet away, he looks less human. Even the burly lab technician doing all the cutting tacitly acknowledges this. He says with a smile and a shrug, 'It's sort of like skinning a deer.'

The body now seems more machine than man. Its parts have been removed, examined and catalogued like the engine of a

junkyard Chevy. And yet, one gets the feeling that even when everything was back under the hood and running smoothly, it still needed a driver. Suddenly, the ancient notion of a body and a soul comes into clearer focus. Something left Marcelino Gill when he died six hours ago in his brother's car in front of a Corny Dog stand on the west side of San Antonio. In the eyes of the state, all that remains of him are bullet holes one, two, three and four.

Marcelino and Manuel, Jr. were buried side by side. Each brother was survived by a wife and two children. The graves of both young men are located next to the grave of their father, Manuel Gill, Sr. Seven years ago in a local bar, he died the same way, of multiple gunshot wounds. This is John Burnett reporting.

Adams: For more than twenty years now, the National Rifle Association has led the fight against gun control. The NRA has some three million members, a large and dedicated staff, and a budget some estimate at over eighty million dollars a year. Over the past couple of years, the NRA has suffered some unaccustomed defeats, but as NPR's Neal Conan reports now, it's still regarded by political professionals as the most powerful and effective lobby in the country.

Senator Paul Simon (Chairman, Senate Judiciary Subcommittee): The subcommittee will come to order. We have a hearing today on a proposal calling for a waiting period on handguns.

Neal Conan reporting:

Paul Simon chairs the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, which meets in a surprisingly small hearing room on the second floor of the Dirksen Office Building on Capitol Hill. It's a familiar battleground where both sides know the intellectual terrain as well as Lee and Grant knew the approaches to Richmond. On this day last month, the subcommittee hears about the proposed seven day waiting period on handguns, a measure known as the Brady Bill after former White House Press Secretary James Brady was shot in the head when John Hinckley tried to assassinate President Reagan. James Brady is here today to testify for the first time since he was injured.

James Brady (Former White House Press Secretary): Mr. Chairman and members of this subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify. Of course, I'm honored to be here, but it's not the honor that compelled me to appear before you today. It's the anger; anger at a Congress that just a year ago failed to pass a major which would reduce the handgun violence now plaguing our nation. I had no choice but to be here today because too many members of Congress have been gutless on this issue. I think another member said that they'd been afraid to take on the National Rifle Association. They have closed their eyes to the tragedies like mine...

Conan: The testimony from a wheelchair is clearly moving, and this is the moment that would end up on network television news. But a point that's largely lost is that this hearing is a wake of sorts, where gun control advocates have gathered to complain about how they were outmaneuvered and defeated, and promised to do better in the next session of Congress. And there to testify too, is the NRA.

Simon: Very pleased to have you here, Mr. Baker.

James J. Baker (Chief Lobbyist, National Rifle Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to represent the views of the National Rifle Association. The letter I received from yourself indicated that this was to be another hearing on waiting periods. Mr. Chairman, this has become an annual exercise. The subcommittee has held two hearings in the Hundredth Congress on Senator Metzenbaum...

Conan: James J. Baker is not a riveting witness, but while he loses this media skirmish on promotional points, the NRA's chief Capitol Hill lobbyist can look back on a year of unbroken success. More than half a dozen bills proposing some kind of gun control were introduced this session. Two, the Brady Bill and Senator Dennis DeConcini's ban on some semiautomatic assault rifles were given a serious chance. Not one passed.

Wayne LaPierre [sp] is J. Baker's boss, executive director of the NRA's lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action.

Wayne LaPierre (Executive Director, Institute for Legislative Action): When someone says they're worried about the National Rifle Association, this so-called power thing- I mean, all that really means to me is, hey, you know, if I represent a state where, you know, hundreds of thousands of people hunt, are engaged in recreational shooting, own guns for self-defense, that's an interest I have to be concerned about, and if you're going to take that away from them, it's going to be a hot issue.

Conan: And the heat has been on this past year. In January, a new issue emerged after Patrick Purdy opened fire on a schoolyard in Stockton, California with a semiautomatic version of the famous AK-47 assault rifle. Five children were killed, many more wounded. The incident sparked a national debate on assault weapons and a law banning some of them was approved by the California legislature. Similar bills were introduced in several other states, including Colorado. (Audio of police radio.)

Unidentified Announcer: Shots fired, two officers down; part of twenty-year-old Eugene Thompson's day-long shooting rampage in Arapahoe and Douglas Counties. Police never fired a shot, but Thompson fired many with his Mac 11. It's a military machine pistol.

Conan: This incident in March came as the Colorado legislature was considering an assault weapons ban. The opposition was headed not by the NRA as such, but by the Colorado Firearms Coalition, a group organized this year by a man named Jay Peck, who said the NRA warned that it was going to need local help following the shootings in Stockton.

Jay Peck (Colorado Firearms Coalition): The NRA couldn't deal with it. This thing is just like a bunch of bees stinging you. You just can't slap them all at once.

Conan: The NRA says it prefers to leave local issues in the hands of local organizations, but in this case, distinction

was blurred by the fact that Jay Peck is married to the treasurer of the NRA's officially sanctioned state association. Peck maintains that the Firearms Coalition is independent; critics charge that it's an NRA shell. Less than a month after it was formed, the Colorado Firearms Coalition mounted a major campaign in the Colorado legislature.

Peck: We did letter-writing, we did telephones, we jammed up fax machines at the capital. So much activity was coming through the switchboards that it disrupted, in part, the business of the legislature.

Conan: The assault weapons bill never reached the floor. Its sponsor, Democratic State Senator Pat Pasco [sp] lost a crucial vote, five to four.

Pat Pasco (Democratic State Senator, Colorado): I actually thought I was going to get it on a committee up until the day beforehand, when I lost one of my supporters.

Conan: Why did you lose the supporter?

Pasco: Well, there are different versions of why I lost the supporter, but for one thing, I think the leadership felt this was too hot an issue to come to the floor. I think that the people perhaps would have voted for it until there was some kind of pressure against them.

Conan: The pressure on Senator Pasco included death threats that forced her to accept special police protection, threats she blames on the NRA.

Pasco: They whip up the lunatic fringe, is the only way I can describe it, into a frenzy, and they're beyond the control of the NRA at that point. And I can't say they're deliberately, directly responsible, but these people have gotten beyond their control and at that point, they could do anything.

Peck: The issuance of threats or anything like this is beyond the call of duty with respect to these people, and I'm not going to stand for it. But then again, the people are not doing it, either.

Conan: This is hardly the first time that the gun lobby's been accused of bullying and while its critics charge that intimidation is an integral part of its tactics, Wayne LaPierre says the NRA and its local allies succeed through hard work, persistence and good organization.

LaPierre: We certainly- and we provide them with tapes on how the guns function, we'll provide them with factual information in terms of statistics, expertise in terms of what's the best way to go about contacting your legislators, day to day advice on the mechanics of the process.

Conan: While the NRA itself has a membership of under three million, it has access to many millions more: members of the fourteen thousand gun clubs across the country, the twenty million who take out hunting licenses every year, people the NRA often contacts with one of its alerts, warnings of an upcoming vote or a hearing, complete with the home telephone numbers and addresses of the legislators involved. This fall,

the NRA sent another warning out to Colorado, when an assault weapons bill re-emerged. (Audio of newscast on bill.)

This time, the assault weapons issue was before the Denver City Council and again, the Colorado Firearms Coalition pulled out all the stops in another bruising fight. Volunteers from the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars delivered leaflets to every house in the city the weekend before the vote. The NRA sent one of its top public relations aides to Denver to help coordinate the schedules of some well-known speakers who were brought in over the last few days to saturate the media. (Audio of talk show opening.)

The speakers make themselves available for TV interviews on the front steps of the city and county council building, and a local TV reporter wants to know why Roy Innis [sp], a civil rights figure is involved.

Unidentified Reporter: What has the racial issue to do with this issue?

Roy Innis (Congress on Racial Equality): Well, really, it is not a racial issue, it's a civil rights issue. The First Amendment is sacred to all of us. So is the Second Amendment. The founding fathers were wise men...

Conan: The TV camera leads the way upstairs to watch Innis buttonhole a councilmember.

In the next phase of the campaign, the Firearms Coalition turned out perhaps five hundred people to pack the council hearing that night, outnumbering those who supported the gun ban by about twenty to one. (Audio of start of hearing.)

Councilwoman Kathy Reynolds, the sponsor of the assault gun bill, acknowledged that the effort organized against her was awesome, but this time, it wasn't enough. Kathy Reynold's bill passed nine to four.

Kathy Reynolds (Assault Gun Bill Sponsor): A vast majority of the phone calls and letters we got were from people affiliated with either the NRA or the Colorado coalition. But what I found just going out on my normal rounds out in the community, the community meetings, is most people out there are surprised that these weapons were legal in the first place. They're powerful, but they're not God almighty, and I- they're not a majority of my community.

Conan: One important reason the NRA has begun to have some problems is that it's lost the support of many in law enforcement. For example, Pat Sullivan, the sheriff of Arapahoe County in suburban Denver.

Pat Sullivan (Arapahoe County Sheriff): A good many of my friends began to question even my sanity as being a Republican elected sheriff in Colorado, the hunting capital of the nation.

Conan: Sullivan says the split is the result of a series of NRA positions over the past few years, on issues that cops consider life and death: ammunition coated with Teflon, designed to penetrate bullet-proof vests, guns built of plastic to flit through metal detectors.

Sullivan: The law enforcement and NRA were one and the same, but what's happened with the start of the Teflon bullet issue,

and then followed with the plastic gun issue and particularly now, in the assault weapons, is, we're a hundred and eighty degrees apart.

Conan: What's happening, do you think?

Sullivan: I think there are a tremendous number of very fine individuals in the NRA. The NRA right now has an extremist leadership.

Conan: This summer, Patrick McWiggin [sp], a senior scholar with the Free Congress Center for Law and Democracy, a conservative think tank in Washington, wrote a controversial article accusing the NRA's leadership of single-issue myopia, of taking such an absolutist position on the Second Amendment that it was alienating not just law enforcement but increasing numbers of conservatives.

Patrick McWiggin (Free Congress Center for Law and Democracy): I think Americans should be able to purchase and use semiautomatic rifles. In that respect, I suppose I agree with the NRA. But it's the NRA itself, because of the attitude it took on in earlier confrontations which related merely to regulation of the right to keep and bear arms, they're now in a situation where they're standing almost- not completely, but almost alone. And ironically at a time that the political dynamic has steadily shifted in the direction of which you could say is a conservative/libertarian/traditionalist mindset all over the country, the NRA has in that same decade of transformation become more marginal in its effectiveness and impact, and they've brought it on themselves, their own leadership.

Conan: The NRA's philosophy and its reluctance to compromise is based on its reading of the Second Amendment as guaranteeing an individual's right to bear arms. It's an interpretation shared by very few legal scholars, and one that's never been supported by the Supreme Court. This summer, after Chinese troops opened fire on unarmed demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, the NRA ran an ad that emphasized that only one side had guns. Again, Wayne LaPierre.

LaPierre: It was interesting, because we were interested in how the Chinese students felt about that ad. Some of them came to our building after that and we asked them about it, and they said, 'Well, it's been an issue. We always thought that freedom in this country rested on the First Amendment.' They said, 'We learned firsthand that freedom to a large degree rests on the Second Amendment right of citizens to own firearms.'

Conan: So, that- would it be fair to say that the NRA sees the right to bear arms and an armed citizenry as the best defense against tyranny then?

LaPierre: I think certainly, when our founding fathers put together the Bill of Rights and our Constitution, they felt that in an armed citizenry was one of the best defenders of freedom. The fact is, if you look at a country like Afghanistan, just recently- I mean, you had individual citizens over there basically defending themselves against the whole Soviet army, with individual firearms.

Conan: As a practical matter though, the NRA's strident interpretation of this principle has hurt. James Simpson Brenner [sp], for example, a pro-gun conservative Republican who's also a member of the House Judiciary Committee, was attacked by the NRA after he supported the Brady Bill, the seven-day waiting period on handguns. An NRA letter to his constituents said, 'You might as well have Ted Kennedy representing you.' Simpson-Brenner wrote back that the letter was, quote, "...false, and plays on hysteria in an attempt to get me to change my vote." Senator James Exon of Nebraska, a pro-gun Demcrat, was targeted after he opposed the NRA on plastic guns. An article Exon wrote in the Lincoln Journal called the attacks, quote, "...outrageous and incorrect," though he did not identify the NRA by name, and one measure of its continuing power may be that both Senator Exon and Congressman Simpson-Brenner declined to be interviewed for this report.

Next year, both the Brady Bill and Senator DeConcini's assault gun ban will be back before Congress, and Wayne LaPierre says the NRA will be doing what congressional staffers say it does best: filling the offices of wavering lawmakers with thousands of letters and telegrams and phone calls.

LaPierre: It's not backroom power, it's not the things you read about in the paper; it's the power of people that believe in something, and that's- if I had to take one lobbying tool, of all else, that's the one I'd pick and that's the one NRA has, and we're thankful for it every day.

Conan: The NRA is no longer invincible. Its power may be eroding, its alliances strained, but as long as it commands that corps of dedicated believers, it will continue to be effective and continue winning most of the battles most of the time. This is Neal Conan reporting.

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DATE December 13, 1989
TIME 8:40 AM (ET)
NETWORK National Public Radio
PROGRAM All Things Considered

TRANSCRIPT

Bob Edwards, anchor:

This year, Smith and Wesson, the country's biggest gun manufacturer, introduced a new line of handguns designed specifically for women. The company says more women are buying guns and that's good news for an industry in which production has been declining. What the trend might mean for women is a more complicated issue. With part three of our series on "Guns in America," NPR's Celeste Wesson reports from Los Angeles.

Celeste Wesson reporting:

There are no independent surveys on women's gun ownership, but Smith and Wesson says it's polls show that the number of women thinking about buying a handgun doubled in the last five years. They say more than fifteen million women are now considering gun ownership. Whether or not all those women ever actually buy a gun, if you talk to women about guns, you learn a lot of other things about what their lives are like.

Misako Young stands on the line with six other shooters at a range in San Jose. She carefully sights her target, and squeezes the trigger six steady shots. She's the best shot among the women in her weekly pistol league. Young says she started out shooting for fun, but that her skill makes her feel safer too.

Misako Young (Shooter): I'm so glad I can handle a gun even in the dark because of so many years, so many times handling a gun.

Wesson: In fact most women, some experts say ninety percent of them, first buy a gun for self-defense.

Unidentified Woman: I was married to a very violent and unpredictable man who'd been abusing me for years, and I was afraid if I left him that he would come after me and kill me.

Wesson: When this woman did leave her husband, she decided it was time to learn how to shoot her .357 magnum.

Unidentified Woman: I know for sure how to handle my gun safely. And I know for sure that within six shots at least two of them are going to get him vitally and, with the type of gun I have, you know, hopefully, unless he's on PCP, he's out of it. And that has made the biggest difference in my life, because I'm not afraid to be in my house.

Diana Strond: This man had a butcher knife, that had a very long blade, and he had that through the door jam and was flipping up the various locks.

Wesson: Diana Strond's husband was away at work that night. She got the gun, went back to the door:

Strond: ...told him I had a gun, and then let the slide go so that he could hear it, and then backed up and waited and shook. But fortunately, he went away.

Wesson: How did you feel after he left?

Strond: Oh, I shook for hours, just hours. I was physically sick. It was a very frightening experience, but I'd have still shot the gun. I know I would have. I'm not a feminist, but I do feel that I am responsible for me. My husband isn't responsible for me. And I think more and more women are coming to that conclusion.

Wesson: The underlying motivation is fear: The fear women feel because they live alone or just with their children, as a growing number of women do, the fear that crime rates are high, that no one will come if they call for help. Paxton Quigley is the author of "Armed and Female," which advocates gun ownership. She says that facing her fear made learning to shoot scary at first, and then liberating.

Paxton Quigley (Author): I was really confronting my fear of my safety in terms of, 'OK, I was now going to be making this big step, that I was going to be taking care of myself.' I was not going to have to think about somebody else, about the police, or a boy friend. I was going to be the one.

Wesson: Quigley says women's fear and unfamiliarity with guns may be an advantage. Men think they're supposed to be John Wayne, that somehow they were born knowing how to shoot. Women know they don't know, says Quigley, so they listen to their instructors. And when they realize they can shoot, she says, it's a sweet triumph.

Quigley: Always at the end of the training, they just love their targets, and they take them home, and they're showing them to their boyfriends and their fathers, or whomever. But they love to show them to guys, that's for sure, and say, 'See what I can do?'

Wesson: Smith and Wesson took that spirit into account when it decided it could sell more guns to women. They did a lot of market research- questionnaires, focus groups- to develop their new LadySmith revolver. It's a .38 special, modified so that smaller hands can reach the trigger and pull it easily. It's not, says advertising and promotion director Michael Shapula, the kind of lady's gun that other companies tried to market in the past.

Michael Shapula (Smith and Wesson): Some decided to engrave roses on a handle, other decided to put colored grips, they addressed the women's gun as a cosmetic variation. The women

in our focus groups clearly indicated they didn't want something cute. They wanted it to look like a gun, so there was no doubt, if they had to use it, that it was a handgun.

Wesson: But marketing a gun to women is a delicate task requiring that several images be transmitted at once. The LadySmith may be a lethal weapon, but the brochure depicts it next to a glossy fur coat and a yellow rose bud- feminine surroundings that seem to obscure it's function. The logo is a kind of ladylike script you might see on personal hygiene products. The gun totally disappears from print ads for the LadySmith, partly because magazines don't like ads for controversial products. So there's just a Smith and Wesson 800 number, and what seem to be public service tips on what to do if you hear an intruder or your car stalls at night. Still, the ads must remind women why they may need the product. "Things that go bump in the night are not always your imagination," reads one, above a sketch of a woman, her eyes like saucers, sitting up alone in bed. Smith and Wesson's Michael Shapula insists that the ads elicit awareness, not fear.

Shapula: I think fear is an inappropriate word. The whole purpose of this campaign was to educate women, provide a little common sense as to how they could prevent themselves from becoming victims. I think it's more fearful for a woman to not know how to react to a situation, then it is to tell them how to react.

Wesson: That women are reacting by buying guns to protect themselves could possibly be an encouraging signal says Ann Snetow (sp), a feminist activist who teaches literature and Women's Studies. There's an old bargain between men and women, she says, that's used to justify a lot of violence; the bargain that women are vulnerable and men protect them. But if women can protect themselves, she says, that undercuts the bargain and the justification for the violence. On the other hand, says Snetow, when feminists advocated that women protect themselves, guns weren't exactly what they had in mind.

Ann Snetow (Activist): Maybe we're abandoning another whole possibility, which is for a more caring, protective society in general. That as women see they are getting less and less protection from men, is the solution to that that there's going to be less protection in general, that everybody's just going to protect themselves, and there won't be institutions and cultural understandings that lead people to feel that they need to protect each other?

Wesson: In fact, many women who buy guns, like many men, will never learn to shoot or have an opportunity to use the gun for self-defense. Women may be buying the idea of protection or, as Snetow puts it, a new accessory of independence.

Snetow: It reminds me of a new line of cosmetics which is supposed to deal with environmental dangers- sun screens and other things. That's supposed to be a personal solution to the fact that the ozone layer is depleted. The idea that there is some sort of private product, you know, a fancy cream, an elegant looking gun, with which you can sort of handle mass societal threats through personal consumerism.